

Greetings to the Members of Council

From the Vision Process Team

April 23, 2009

The typical vision process involves three main phases:

1. Discovering – researching, listening and recording
2. Discerning – distilling, codifying what we have discovered into a vision
3. Embodying – repositioning, retooling the presbytery to carry out the vision.

On Friday we are ready to bring to you all that we have gleaned from Phase I, “Discovering,” in this process. We have listened in many venues: Council, CoM and other meetings and in clusters with some congregations. We have heard the voices of presbytery towards discovering God’s mission as all reflected on Dwelling in the Word; as we did the research on our presbytery and our mission area; as we read and wrestled together on issues of cultural and technological change.

In this e-mail we present to you several documents for your consideration and preparation for our discussion on Friday afternoon:

1. A diagram of the process we are following.
2. A compilation and initial distillation from all the “Dwellings in the Word.”
3. A compilation of presbytery and regional statistics.
4. Presbytery’s and council’s reflections on developing technological and cultural issues.

As you read the observations and findings, would you ask yourself the following questions that all of us may be prepared to contribute our best thinking:

1. What findings strike me as important?
2. What trends and /or themes are emerging?
3. From all I see here, what do I think God’s vision for Yellowstone Presbytery might be?

This will be a key meeting in the vision process of the presbytery. Please join us in praying for God’s wisdom and leading in our time together.

Ric Tieman, elder, FPC, Bozeman; Debbie Blackburn, elder, Springhill -- Co-Chairs

Mike Gapay, elder from Lewistown.

Jim Bell, retired clergy

Debbie Funke, pastor from Manhattan

George and Kathy Goodrich, *ex-officio*

Yellowstone Presbytery's Year of Visioning and Discernment—WHERE ARE WE?

DISCOVERING what God is up to in the world today

Dwelling in the Word with Sessions, Presbytery, Council, committees/teams

Presbytery data/stats from Ten Year Report and Persept Report

Assets, dreams, needs – Presbytery Council, committees & congregations

Insights from the Holy Spirit's work from other Christians asking similar questions in 21st Century – PC(USA), other Christians, resources of various kinds, consultant

Vision Team presents "Our Iceberg Is Melting" to Presbytery as model for presentation and training in new strategies, practices.

**Discerning God's Vision for
Yellowstone Presbytery in
the 21st Century
What is God's vision for us?**

Vision Team acts as Vision
Panel to distill all input and
draft statement from May
input

APRIL – MAY 2009

EMBODYING God's preferred future for Yellowstone Presbytery

How will we EMBODY God's vision in our life and mission?

Draft vision statement presented to Presbytery at May meeting.

September- Presbytery gathers for vision retreat

November—Presbytery gathers, works on implementation, more equipping for new vision and practices

YELLOWSTONE PRESBYTERY STATISTICS AND DATA
Vision Team research summary 4-09

1. In the past ten years Montana has had a 23% increase in population while Yellowstone Presbytery has had a 16.5% decline in membership.
2. Last year 15 of our 27 congregations averaged less than 50 people in worship. Ten years ago 9 congregations averaged less than 50 in worship. We have had a 67% increase in the number of congregations with less than 50 in worship in the last 10 years. More than one third of all our congregations had a loss in worship attendance last year.
3. We have not had a successful new church development in 41 years since St. Andrews was started in Billings, MT.
4. In the last 10 years the average age of all Montanans has declined while the average age of those in our churches has increased.
5. The largest percentage age group in our Presbytery area is the 6-25 age group which represents 27.5% of the total population.
6. The top household concerns of those in our Presbytery area include:
 - A. Lack of proper health care insurance
 - B. Day to day financial commitments
 - C. Providing adequate food for the family (1 in 11 Montanans use food Stamps 3-09, fr. MT Public Assistance bureau chief)
 - D. Lack of employment opportunities
 - E. Dealing with substance abuse, parenting teen/child problems, abusive relationships, divorce [and suicide rates that are the nation's highest].
7. 22% of all Montanans indicate they have no religious preference. This is twice as high as the national average.
8. 39.4% of Montanans say they are not involved with their faith.
23.8% are somewhat involved.
35.8% are strongly involved with their faith
9. There is an ongoing decline in our rural population accompanied by a related loss of professional services in the same areas.
10. The primary reason given by people leaving the Church is that their spiritual needs are not being met.
11. People looking for a new church rate as most important: Bible study discussion and prayer groups; marriage enrichment opportunities; Youth & family activities/programs; active retirement programs; counseling.
- 12 Average 2007 household income (YP) is \$51,797, \$14,000, below national average by and YP area has many more households earning less than \$34,000 than there are nationally. .
13. By 2013, at the latest, Yellowstone Presbytery will have a negative cash flow.

The Role of the Church as shown in the text: Results of Dwelling in the Word

Whereas: The second question for ordination (W-4.4003b) is: *Do you accept the Scriptures of the Old and new Testaments to be, by the Holy Spirit, the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ in the Church Universal and God's Word to you?*

Whereas: Joshua 1:8 reads: *The Lord said to Joshua.... Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it say and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.*

Whereas: The Second Helvetic Confession Begins: *We believe and confess that the canonical Scriptures of the holy prophets and apostles... to be the true Word of God, and to have sufficient authority of themselves, not of men. For God [himself] spoke . . . and still speaks to us through the Holy Scriptures . . . and also to the framing of life acceptable to God.*

Whereas: The Brief Statement of Reformed Faith teaches: *The same Spirit who inspired the prophets and apostles rules our faith and life in Christ through Scripture.*

Therefore: *We have diligently sought to allow the Holy Spirit to speak to and guide the presbytery into ways and mission and ultimately a vision that emerges from the intersection of our corporate life in Christ with the Scripture. The findings of such sessions are listed below.*

Acts 6:1-7

The high priority of ministry of the Word . . . Prayer

The responsibility of the call . . . full of faith and Holy Spirit...

Use different gifts for different tasks...

Caring in practical ways, meeting needs... Results flow...

God works through systems; creativity, *adaptations to maintain mission priorities and adjust to growth, and changing circumstances.*

Acts 15:1-24

Teaching – vs.1 Importance of sound doctrine.

Debate the practical theology... open discussion to the solution.

Guided- by scripture & *“it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us”*

Witness to the work of God, vs. 12... Knowing and sharing what God is doing.

Be connectional... Lots of Communication and reporting back.

Luke 9-10---

Previously disciples are called, shown how , now, empowered, sent “GO”

Resources given to disciples by God: Christ's power and Authority to -

Exorcise evil, heal and preach the kingdom Good News

Welcome those who need healing
Be the source of sustenance – manna, bread.
Deny self, take up cross and follow Christ...

Transfiguration: recognize Lordship of Jesus/ live in and out of that reality.
“This is my son, listen to him . . .”. Simple.
Not to dwell on the mountain . . . sent back down . . .

Matthew 28:18-20 – Going... Baptize... Teach *to obey/live ALL Christ has commanded*
(Discipleship)

Luke 10: 1-
High Cost of Discipleship
Harvest the Harvest. I send ...Go. *In two's*
Expect rejection and challenge, and don't waste time with those not interested.
“Go... the Gospel . . . and the Holy Spirit . . .”
Reveals... depends on the Holy Spirit.
Rejoice in our identity in Christ, names written in Book of Life
Rhythm – sent on mission, return to talk with Christ (prayer) and other disciples and
disperses, sent out again . . .

John 13:1-17 – The new Commandment Fellowship . . .
As servants of Christ, we love one another . . .”
Core Values . . . Study the Word . . . Follow the Spirit . . .
Images: The Bowl . . . The Pitcher . . . The Towel . . .

Discern / Distill the Core Values... Under the Holy Spirit's leading...

High priority of teaching and preaching the Word and prayer.
The Church's authority is from and for Christ.
Discipleship and Christian growth / Christlikeness
We are sent to join Christ in his mission of sharing and embodying His Good News; in
our words, actions, relationships, and both church and wider community.
We are One Body – connectional; with many different gifts.

Such is the most important work of the Church in Christ . . .

Technological and social shifts in communications, media, values, and lifestyles.

- New ways of communicating - faxes and e-mail
- Phone call conferences and computers used for meetings
- Church is not the only option on Sunday
- More women working outside the home
- Women elders and pastors
- Information available via the internet
- Loss of influence of mainline churches
- Cell phones and text messaging used for instant communication
- More people working - fewer volunteers
- Children have many more activities scheduled
- Many stores now open on Sundays
- Church attendance no longer the norm
- Less personal contact since the advent of advanced technology
- More expected of students now
- Fewer young families in church now
- Church no longer the center of family social life